

## ***FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** November 14, 2013

**Agenda Item:** 2013-14 Helena Urban Deer Management

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Approval of Proposed Rule

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 15 minutes

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### **Background**

In 2003, the Montana Legislature authorized cities to create plans to control wildlife to address public health and safety within city limits. Such plans must be approved by the F&W Commission. The City of Helena subsequently developed an Urban Deer Management Plan seeking to initially remove 350 deer to achieve an objective of 25 deer per square mile. FWP completed a third, programmatic EA in 2009 that confirmed objectives and methods relative to urban deer management in Helena. Within the plan, any take/removal of deer requires approval on an annual basis. To date, a total of 670 deer have been removed, including 140 during the latest removal effort in 2013. FWP does not contribute staff or resources to actual removal efforts. Any quotas do not apply to individual deer removed under urgent public-safety situations.

Survey data are collected and analyzed annually in October. Subsequently, the city, in cooperation with the local FWP biologist, establishes a level of take, which is presented to the Commission as a proposal in November and finalized in December, when take efforts are authorized to begin. The take authorization last year was valid through Dec. 31, 2013, with a no-take period extending from April 1 through Nov. 14, 2013.

October's survey revealed an estimate of approximately 14 deer per square mile within the City of Helena. This is down from the previous estimate of 34 deer/square mile last year. Because of survey conditions and potential distribution changes, it is likely that the actual abundance is somewhat higher. The estimate was similarly low in 2010, and that prompted a low removal (26 deer), resulting in a jump to 32 deer/square mile the subsequent year. To avoid that outcome, FWP is proposing a removal of up to 70 deer, in addition to the 60 remaining on the authorization from last year, for a total proposed maximum take of 130 deer. It is anticipated that this removal will result in a fall 2014 population at or below 25 deer/square mile. Proposed methods will be identical to those employed previously (trap and lethal removal).

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

The City of Helena conducted extensive public involvement in developing its plan and the previous urban deer environmental assessments. FWP provided separate 30-day public comment periods. Public support has been split throughout these earlier processes. Public comment on this proposal will extend through 5 p.m. Dec. 9.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

The proposal may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, or with deletions as per staff justifications, public comment and/or Commission discussion.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Commission adopt the proposed 2013 - 2014 take of urban deer by the City of Helena as presented by city staff and FWP.